Rowton House Rhymes

William Andrew Mackenzie

Atta M. Ross

ROWTON HOUSE RHYMES

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BY

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TO

CAROLINE PLANT IN NEW YORK

AND

CHARLES L. GRAVES IN LONDON

THESE ROUGH RHYMES

AND

REMEMBRANCE.

APOLOGIA PRO SUIS CARMINIBUS.

O WHAT a royal thing is Reticence!
And Silence, O how god-like splendid! Yet,
We that are singers, and have need of pence
To buy our babies bread, why should we let
Aught of the god or king our tongues up-tie
If men will toss us coppers for the song,
And Goldilocks and Dimplechin to die
Forbear? Sure, Silence, then, were hellish wrong.

So to the market-place! If the crowd pay,
Bread's won, and Bread's an honourable cause.
And what care I if some sad critic say:
"Another heart for pecking of the daws!"
Let the daws peck! But let them pay—sesterce,
Sovereign, or cent! All that is grist is good . . .
Shall I be less to mine than is to hers
The pelican that gives her breast for food?

To the Editors of 'Blackwood's Magazine,' the 'Spectator,' the 'Nation,' and the 'Graphic,' I offer my thanks for permission to reprint the Rhymes they honoured with their hospitality.

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ROWTON HOUSE RHYMES.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

When you've just a single shot left in your locker,
And your soul of all but death is bare and barren,
Be you priest or poet, don or drunken docker,
Here's your haven, here's the wounded rabbit's warren.

If you dread the smoky sunrise of the morrow,
Bringing torments, old ones, new ones, without number,
Enter here and hide your fear, your sin, your sorrow—
Buy a bed: perhaps you may be buying slumber.

When you feel you're a bewildered bit of lumber—
You, the hero, just a zero, just a cipher—
Pay your seven pennies down, and be a number—
Is it good to still be human as a 'lifer'? . . .

Tisn't much. Yet when you learn you're "One-eleven,
And you're placed in proud possession of your ticket
You've the right to walk the "House," and prove the heaven
That awaits you once you pass the porter's wicket.

How you throw your load of sorrow off, and kick it
Down the corridor a-shine with snowy tiling!
(What a magic thing, that sevenpenny ticket!)
All the black impending future's almost smiling.

You may hold your head up, here, among your *brothers:*
Yes, you feel the slack Serratus Magnus stiffen;
You have grown; you are a being; *they* are *others;*
They are gutter-sparrows, *you* are still the Griffin.

There's a kitchen where they feed you, so you tiffin—
Sloppy tea, and sodden bread, and cruel butter!
Ah! it's now the mental back begins to stiffen:
When the belly's full, God leaps from every gutter,

And there's hope and cheer in London's roar and rumble,
And there's promise in the rain's persistent batter,
And there's order plain in Life's gigantic jumble,
And to-morrow—Lord, to-morrow doesn't matter!

For like stomach-warmth there's none knows how
to flatter—
O it's Paradise you purchase for a pittance!
With the largess of a rumpsteak, you would batter
Down the Door of Life should Fate deny admittance!

Fate? Oh shoot at Fate the tongue-tip of derision!—
Pass these iron gates, and mount this stony ladder
Leads to Dreamland and the Pisgah-heights of
Vision,
Piercing sunset skies of saffron and rose-madder.

Here the soul finds poppy-juice to ease and glad
her,
And the radiant lotus-flower of royal slumber!
Surely this cemented stair's a golden ladder
Angel-cohorts, bearing lilies, climb and cumber. . . .

93 and 99 and 1-11—
That your cubicle? Ah! no, it is your splendid
Joyous Gard and very anteroom of Heaven—
Your Friedenheim with all your troubles ended!

Half, already, of the "ravelled sleeve" is mended
Ere you've squirmed below the blanket brown and
narrow.
(Blessed blanket! Is it not a buckler splendid
Nobly warding off Insomnia's poisoned arrow?)

So you open wide your eager arms, and clasping
Close the only worthy mistress, Sleep; forgetting,
In her soft embrace, your groping and your grasping
After food and farthings, all your fear and fretting—

Your wearinesses, multiform, besetting,
Slip from you in the rosy flood of Dreaming:
The Sun shall rise for you, and know no setting,
And Fortune's hands with gold and gems be teeming. . . .

But midway in your dream, you hear a sighing,
A dolorous complaint, that breaks your sleeping:
"Ah! God," you say, "it is a man that's crying!"—
And lo! your cheeks are wet. 'Tis you are weeping.

LONDON STREETS.

O Streets of London,
Here's a poor undone
  Son of misfortune
    Your asphalt beats!
Down!—He goes under!—
Was't then a blunder
  You to importune,
    O London Streets?

I hear the thunder,
I see the wonder,
  Here, where the City
    The gold Strand meets—
Money in millions,
Bullion in billions—
  But where's your pity,
    O London Streets?

Fortune the strumpet,
Fame and her trumpet,
  Lovely and living
    Youth here entreats;

But to the worn one,
Weary forlorn one,
What gifts for giving,
O London Streets?

Care and confusion,
Dust, disillusion,
Thistles for reaping
(*Thistles who eats?*),
Dark and the night-time,
Fear and the flight-time,
Loneliness, weeping—
O London Streets!

Could I but wander
Home, away yonder,
Far from your fretting
Noises and heats,
Sweeter than olden
April dreams golden
Would be forgetting
You, London Streets!

THE BEATEN WILL.

How I despise these leaky boots,
  This seedy hat, this ink-seamed coat,
These trousers where the knees rub through,
  And this frayed clout about my throat;
These duds of drab desuetude,
  These "signals of distress" I loathe;
But, more than these, far more, I hate
    The thing they clothe.

I hate the members impotent,
  The poltroon hand that drops the tool,
The eyes that drown in futile tears,
  The limp, lax tongue still rasps me "Fool!"
All this where never a shadow or hint
  Of God's resplendent image hovers;
But, more, far more, I hate the thing
    The body covers—

The beaten Will that quakes and quails,
  And, mouse-like, scuttles, scant of breath,
From all that's life, to nose and sniff
  The "Great Peace"-baited trap of death.

This thing to marshal all my powers,
And captain them against the world
When "Boot and Saddle" rings, and Fate's
Blind bolts are hurled!

This fearful feeble craven thing,
My Ganymede pours wine of fight!
This blinking broken crippled thing,
My scout and comrade in the night!
This—takes the insult and the blow,
As water takes and keeps the rain—
This, bugle courage! this, sing hope!
This, mock at pain!

Here, Will, my master, if Life fills
You so with fear—Life, finite, small—
How shall you face Immensity,
Where you are nothing, God's will all?
What shall you show for trophy won,
What banner greatly wrenched from Fate?
A shred or two of my contempt?
A rag of hate?

BALLADE DE LA BELLE ÉTOILE.

I was young, I was wise, and on dreams was I fed;
To the chime of a rhyme I would dance for a day;
There was green underfoot, there was blue overhead,
And my year had one month—and that month it was May;
And a bird or a bard there was lilted a lay
Of gallant refrain, ringing near, ringing far
(O the light-hearted lift! O the rapturous sway!)—
"I lodge at the Sign of the Beautiful Star."

Not so young, not so wise, and my heart dull as lead,
All my dreams turned to hosts of ghosts that affray,
I am fallen on a dolorous doldrum of dread
Where the year has one month—and its name is Dismay;
And I find I'm the Ass with no windle of hay
To munch or to lie on—for hay's over *par*,
And the vendors of vyvours expect one to pay!—
So I lodge at the Sign of the Beautiful Star.

O the streets, the long streets!—Fate's spider-web spread!
O the mud that is slab, and the sky that is grey!
O the turbid brown Thames—hang him, *he's* got a bed!
O the rain, raining on, for ever and aye!
O the heavenly hotels, where the orchestras play,
All the windows aflame, all the portals ajar!
Here's a bench by the Bridge—and the peeler's away:
I lodge at the Sign of the Beautiful Star.

CHUMMY, here is a hint that will never betray:
When you slouch as a slave behind Misery's car,
It's mighty small comfort to sing or to say,
"I lodge at the Sign of the Beautiful Star."

PENNY PLAIN.

A PENNY SHORT! A greasy brown
That might as well be England's crown,
Since seven pence is Slumber's price,
And you've but six! Here's sage advice:
"Outside—Shanks' mare—and pad the Town!"

The streets are cheap, though peelers frown
And will not let you drowse or drown.
Aye, count your wealth again—once—twice:
A Penny short?

What matter? Hoof it up and down!
See London in her midnight gown!
View Virtue, Vanity, and Vice!
And hear, like Whittington, ring thrice
The bells of Fortune and Renown,
"A Penny short!"

BALLADE DE NUITS BLANCHES.

When the night is white, and flirting Sleep
Flutters her wings and flies away,
And over the fence go a million sheep—
O for the light and the life of day!
In the flaming hours we work and play,
Fret and fume, and bark and bite:
Sick of it all, ah! God, how we pray—
O for the dark and the stars of night!

Wounded and weary, to rest we creep,
And by the doom of doing we lay;
But eyes that would slumber only weep—
O for the light and the life of day!
Our feet are torn by the flinty way
That leads to the Land of Heart's Delight;
The sky is brass, and ever we say—
O for the dark and the stars of night!

We are, alas! the watchers that keep
Vigil vain till the morn breaks grey,
The door-creak noting, the mouse's cheep—
O for the light and the life of day!

We are the feeble the strong Fates bray
Fine as dust in the mortar of fright,
Or, stark and quivering, stab and slay—
O for the dark and the stars of night!

After the dreams that daunt and dismay—
O for the light and the life of day!
But after the horror of futile fight—
O for the dark and the stars of night!

GHOSTS.

THIS is no blasted Moated Grange, yet here's a multitude of ghosts
Grimmer than Dante ever knew, or any Dickens Christmas boasts;

For when I've shut my two-foot door, and shot the bolt, and sighed for sleep,
Round crowd they, one by lean-ribb'd one, and are not dumb, but creak and cheep—

Like the cicadas long ago, when high above Las Palmas town,
Amid the gold of cactus-bloom, and runnel-song, I laid me down,—

For they are frail and famished things, these shadows of the dreams that were
My acolytes when I was God, and Fortune was my thurifer.

Prone is the altar in the dust, and well, ah! well
that it is so—
For my Olympus, after all, was but a mole-hill, now
I know;

Yet these old dreams that waked with me, singing
me songs of high romance,
That made my royal retinue, fluted to feast and
piped to dance,

And spoke the Sun fair for my sake that not too
rudely should he burn,
Cajoled the wind, and coaxed the rain, and back the
hurrying hours did turn,

And gave me roses for my bed, and fanned me with
their wings' caress—
They will not let me be, and O, I loathe them for
their faithfulness. . . .

I am a king whose realm is gone, whose crown is
pawned, whose robes are rags,
And yet whose nerveless ministers show faultless
fealty never flags,

Perfervid constancy that frets, and haste to serve
that has no sense,
Since where's the sceptre, where the crown, and
where the old magnificence?

Here's one—Ambition—these long years my bosom's
friend, my counsellor,
That ever had the spurring word, the bugle-word of
"Conqueror."

'Tis he was wont to show me worlds like clustered
globes of gold—and all
Easy to pluck as peaches are that ripen on a southern
wall;

And Himalayan summits I, alone, might tread of
Power and Fame,
Heaped treasures Song had kept for me, and laurelled
glories without name;

And wondrous women kings might crave, with breasts
of snow, and eyes of fire,
And hair of night. "All these are thine," he'd
trumpet, "King, my King, aspire!"

And now—what swinging sphere, what toppling pin-
nacle, what matchless queen,
Is it he flings upon imagination's hunger-tautened
screen?

(Pity for me that see the thing! Pity for him shall
look and jeer!
I'd laugh if I had laughter left, and I would weep
had I a tear.)

He shows me plain a heaped-up plate—a meal to glut the animal—
Easy to pluck as is a peach that ripens on a southern wall!

And is't Ambition, or the gas-jet whimpering in the corridor,
That creaks "To-morrow's dinner! King, aspire! Aspire, Conquistador!"

And here comes Hope, Ambition's bride—if any cheer is to be said,
She'll surely say it. What says she? "Hope for the seven pence pays your bed!"

And here is Faith, her samite dun, and mildewed all her asphodel,
Who creaks, "Believe, believe, believe—you must, you must believe in Hell!"

And Truth, whom I denied, will now take no denial —I must hark:
"You've twopence, and you're starving, and both Life and Death are hidden dark!"

And here is one I used to call with high-falutin foolishness
But how much pride, and how much love—the Muse! And O! the blank distress

That ashes o'er her faded face, like powder on a harlot's cheek!
I know what she will say, I know 'twill be the same damned cruel creak:

"I cannot find you rhymes for Faith, or Love, or Hope, or Trust, or Truth;
But here's a thousand good to mate with Hunger, Death, and Wasted Youth."

. . . So, one by one, they creak and cheep—then, all together all night long! . . .
. . . The church-bells sound the passing hour; the Parcels porter bangs his gong;

E.R.I.'s vans with flaring lights and thunderous wheels go rocking by;
The sweat-drenched air is loud with snores—O God! how sweet, how sweet to die!

I fling me from the narrow bed that's just a roomy coffin's size;
I fling me down the stairs, and past where Chawles is rubbing sleep-sore eyes;

I flee with flying feet, I spurn the red-brick hygienic hell,
I bless the streets, the morn, the out-all-night white London morn! All's well—

For Joe is shutting up his stall; the scaffie leans upon his broom;
The bobbie watches from the kerb, a drowsy bulk of sulky gloom;

A shameless spent grey cat slinks home; the sparrows hunt their morning meal;
Mount Pleasant flickers out, and up from Phœnix Place the organs wheel;

The Union's brass-bound door's flung wide—a waiting soaker scuttles in,
The horrors shuddering in his rags, to lay his ghosts with three of gin.

And my ghosts, my ghosts? Are they gone? I cannot see them now. But, no—
Forever at my ear they creak! Howe'er I fly, where'er I go,

Ever, forever, night and day, toil I for bread or sigh for sleep,
They're with me, and they are not dumb—they are not dumb—they creak, they cheep,

Like the cicadas long ago, when high above Las Palmas town,
Amid the gold of cactus-bloom, and runnel-song, I laid me down.

ALCOHOL.

For mistress you had Fortune; I,
Fame with her lure and loosely-knotted zone;
And you, the wing-foot nymph whose name is Art.
We gave them youth, we gave them hope and heart,
For them we pledged our harvests yet unsown—
And they deceived us traitorously.

Drink's now the bawd of us that weep
Our cheated past, our future spent ere won.
Her kiss is lowly priced. Forgetfulness
We have of her; and when her paid arms press,
We are clutched into the brute oblivion
Of stertorous unhaunted sleep.

We do not bring her song or flowers;
We do not tremble when she deigns to smile,
Nor catch our breath should she decide to frown:
She is the common woman of the town:
Foul, faithful, free of smirk or painted wile,
She takes our silver, and is ours.

Sleep—one night's sleep—profound, unstirred :
Nirvana after æons of despair ;
Nepenthe after fever-rave and -rack ;
A paradise where all (thank God !) is black ;
A silence deep as Tophet ; and an air
Unbroken of any mocking bird :

Such boons we beg on bended knees
From Heaven high as we are hell-deep low ;
And what is Heaven's answer to our prayer ?
Another blinding billow of despair,
Another clanging dawn of hot-brained woe,
Another plague of memories.

Alcohol's kinder. So to red
Rum and to gin, the Circe virgin-white,
We turn—to all the brands of stoppered hell
Man brews to kill his ache intolerable,
Numb the raw rankle of the world's barbed slight,
And drown yon drumming in the head.

There's poison in her kiss ? We know.
There's death within her cup ? And do you think
Death frights us, us ? No—Life is what we fear,
Life, the long journey, bitter and empty and drear.
But in the fierce foul comradeship of Drink
We can, at least, in blindness go

Down the lone leagues and the sad slopes,
And over the interminable plain,
And, witting nothing, slide into the abyss
Where long have lain snake-Conscience with her hiss,
And bludgeoned Faith, Love gashed and slashed and slain,
And our dead youth, and our dead hopes.

HOURS BEFORE DAWN.

WHERE would I be? . . .
Between the heather and the sea,
Beside a lozenge-windowed Kirk,
That, in this hour of morning mirk,
Looks greyly to the storm-grey Manse,
Whereround tall rhododendrons dance,
There is a belt of greenest grass
Where white-plumed dandelions pass
Their time in tossing on the air
Wing'd seed on seed—light care on care.
Between the heather and the sea,
It's there I'd be!

There, Summer's scourge doth not prevail,
Nor icy Winter's tempest-flail;
And Spring and Autumn shimmer and pass
Like shadowy breath upon a glass.
Shine high the sun, brood low the dark,
Sing soft the wind, sing loud the lark,

The sowers sow, the reapers reap—
Naught touches them that lie and sleep
Between the heather and the sea,
Where I would be.

Nor dreams are theirs, nor hopes, nor fears;
Nor laughter's light, nor noise of tears;
Nor vain-breath struggle to be first;
Nor any soul- or body-thirst;
Nor any hunger, fanged and fierce,
The flesh to slay, the spirit to pierce;
Nor any memory, sad or sweet.
But Sleep is theirs, full, round, complete—
Between the heather and the sea,
Where I would be.

Love rules not there: she owns no thrall
Within these bounds: yon lichened wall
(O wisest, grimmest, best of friends!)
The frontier of her kingdom ends,
As who says "Free! Till death—not after!"
Nor rings there ever children's laughter,
That cruellest of darling chains
Bind weary men to living's pains.
Between the heather and the sea—
It's there I'd be!

Below the dappled nor'land sky,
My father and my mother lie

Deep in the garth of Tired Man's Lease;
And, crowned with plenitude of peace—
As they these thirty years have lain,
From Life's delight and Life's disdain
Securely shut—share unjarred slumber
No jealous dreams of waking cumber,
Between the heather and the sea,
Where I would be.

Thither, O thither, let me wend
This goodly morn of harvest-end,
Forsaking all the doing and din,
To lie and sleep beside my kin. . . .
But first—I know—my dead shall wake,
And open wide their arms, and take
Close, not the man grown, but the child
They knew, by Life yet undefiled—
Between the heather and the sea,
Where I would be.

And we shall talk a little while.
My father with a grave wise smile,
My mother with a wistful tear,
Holding my hands, will listen and hear
My tale—the telling takes not long:
Love, loss; fight, flight; an hour of song.
Then she: "O baby, do not weep!"
And he: "It's over, boy. To sleep!" . . .
Between the heather and the sea—
It's there I'd be!

To sleep, to sleep! . . .
Hark! there's the knell
Relentless of the rousing bell!
Up for another day of doing,
Of fortune-wooing, success-suing!
Up with what hope is left, and out!
Out for assault, rebuff, and rout! . . .
Won I the world, the world I'd pay
For sleep six hundred miles away,
Between the heather and the sea—
Where I would be!

ON THE EMBANKMENT.

To Thames, or soon or late, we come,
All we who after Misery's drum
  Through London's glorious mire have wandered:
The Awkward Squad, whose ensigns are
A serpent and a fallen star;
The legion of the living dead,
With all Life's coin, of gold or lead
  (Yea, even, Charon's obol), squandered:
To London's Lethe, dark and dumb,
Seeking oblivion, all we come.

I came, one night of wind and wet,
And leaned upon the parapet,
  Beside the smiling sister-sphynges;
I scanned the heavens black with snow,
I scanned the sullen snaky flow,
I sought a sign (how man is vain,
Even at the hour when choice is plain!).
  Lo! Heaven answered. From the fringes
Tattered and tenebrous of Night
Peeped, peered, and palpitated bright

A tiny star, a point of fire,
That globed and swelled out wider, higher,
  And grew, before my eyes enraptured,
A rush and flush of gold eclipse,
A herald of apocalypse,
A pharos flashing hope and awe
Across a drowning world. . . . I saw
  The Almighty's lightning, lured and captured,
Splash on the dark with brush of flame
A worthy whisky-nabob's name! . . .

God! I was poor, and I would die,
Believing Death held dignity
  And peace that Life could give me never;
Believing I had won the right,
Unvexed, to woo and wed the Night—
Believing I might drain my dole
Of hemlock from a seemly bowl—
  My last belief—drowned in the river! . . .
And so I cling to rags and breath,
And spurn such trivial, vulgar death.

PANTOUM FOR EVERYBODY.

ART is the game of an hour, or a minute;
  Love is the jest of a night, or a day;
Life is a top, and Death doth spin it:
  Hunger and Thirst are the things that stay.

Love is the jest of a night, or a day.
  Hearken, O Man, and hear, O Woman!—
Hunger and Thirst are the things that stay:
  Do not all serve them, brute and human?

Hearken, O Man, and hear, O Woman!
  Answer, O Saint, and reply, O Sinner!—
Do not all serve them, brute and human?
  Where is a god like Almighty Dinner?

Answer, O Saint, and reply, O Sinner!—
  Who maketh Heaven and who fashions Hell?
Where is a god like Almighty Dinner?
  Hark to the sound of his sacrament bell!

Who maketh Heaven and who fashions Hell,
"Beeton" his Bible, and "Marshall" his psalter?
Hark to the sound of his sacrament bell!
Fall, fall down at his snowy altar!

"Beeton" his Bible, and "Marshall" his psalter—
Dynasties crumble, but—Dinner remains.
Fall, fall down at his snowy altar,
Sure of reward for our plentiful pains!

Dynasties crumble, but Dinner remains.
Laud him with clatter of knife and of fork!
Sure of reward for our plentiful pains,
Laud him with teeth in the *jambon d' York!*

Laud him with clatter of knife and of fork!
Laud him with delicate dexterous carving!
Laud him with teeth in the *jambon d' York!*
Curse the devil of silent starving!

Laud him with delicate dexterous carving!
Pour ye the red Burgundian wine!
Curse the devil of silent starving!
Eat, and drink, and—be divine!

Pour ye the red Burgundian wine!
Art is the game of an hour, or a minute.
Eat, and drink, and be divine!
Life is a top, and Death doth spin it.

MAN AND DOG.

Dear Gentlemen of England, you who daily dine at ease,
And preach the love of man for man, your napkin on your knees;

Who toot the altruistic horn, and bang the holy drum
Of Universal Brotherhood—over your pint of Mumm;

Who perorate that Love must end all misery, all pain,
The while you roll upon the tongue your *bouchée à la reine*;—

I wonder how your love, yours, you who o'er mankind so yearn,
Would stand the test of Hunger! . . . O you've something yet to learn!

You're starving now? Of course, of course! By such starvation grow
Savoy and Carlton dividends. But Hunger do you know,

That comes with furbisht claws to furrow and sear and
gripe and grip,
To wrench and rend and raven and rack, torture and
tear and rip;

Hunger with mace of spikëd steel to beat and bray the
brain,
And press from spirit and sense the sour vintage of
dolour and pain;

Hunger with one fine gift: a dream, smothered in starry
dust,
And veiled in vapours of auroral rose: *the Phantom
Crust?* . . .

Then lolls the tongue a cindered rag, bitter and hot
and salt;
The hands are palsied, and the feet falter and stumble
and halt;

The straight back bends; the stout reins slack; the
wire-cord sinews wilt;
The joints are water; and the heart melts like a
herring-milt.

This do I know that witness. . . . All that woful
nightmare time,
I kept my trust in humankind, a simple faith sublime:

I loved my fellows all. And then I went to school to Fate,
And learned how frail is lifelong love before a moment's hate. . . .

. . . . . .

I had been out in London's streets; I had gone up and down,
Drumming on half a hundred doors to earn me half a crown;

And after six hours' pad and pike through summer's hot offence,
I crawled, I crumbled, kennelwards, rich by four royal pence. . . .

Ox-liver, onions, bread, I bought in reeking Exmouth Street:
You do a lot for fourpence there when June brings in the heat.

So, to the House! and fried my feast—(O but the smell was good!
You've heard, perhaps, how hungry men get dazed and fuddled with food?

Well, I was blind!)—and sought a plate to lay my
glory on;
Then back to where I'd left my frying-pan—glared,
stared—'Twas gone—

Pinched!—Sneaked!—Rooked!—Robbed!—Ah!
how the weak tears fell!
And in the coke fire's crimson heart I saw the core of
Hell,

And there, to feed the flame, I flung my love for
Brother Dog,
Too tired to trail another hour the decorative clog.

The thief—may his bones rot!—I never found. But
if I had,
The cur had met another cur, sharp-fanged and
vengeance-mad,

That would have pinned him by the throat, nor left
him long in doubt,
But savaged him, and ripped and riped his robber
gullet out;—

Or found his plate and plundered it, nor thought
myself a thief—
And wasted—*wasted*—what I could not eat—to gay
his grief!

. . . . . .

Too horrible? O gentle sirs, your pain-closed eyes attest
You've always thought of Hunger as a midriff-tickling jest.

Too horrible? No dog has ever snatched your only bone,
And left your heart without a throb, your throat without a moan.

Too horrible? Of course, it is. But—Hunger's horrible!
I've met the Beast, and bested him, and dare stand up and tell

You, Gentlemen of England, who preach pretty fairy-tales
Of Charity and Comradeship and Love that never fails,

And how these generous sentiments, with pleasant social pap,
Shall revolutionise the world and change the moral map—

I dare stand up and tell you that you hold a worthless brief:
When "Famine strips the bone," *Damn all has other name than Beef*

Is what—still near his sire, the wolf—the common
mongrel snarls.
He'll yap the same, his moment come, will delicate
King Charles.

O but I'd like to have you here, and tighten up your
belt!
You'd do, I swear, as my thief did—or feel as I then
felt.

A BLESSËD DAMOZEL.

(At the Bar of the Kitchen.)

Her name is Helen. That is all
Of Greek or goddess in her;
He'd know the A but not the Z
Of Art who'd wish to win her.

Her shape is limp and sloppy and slack,
Nor trim her waist, nor taper;
Pasty her skin, and dank her hair
With grease and kitchen vapour.

She has the Cockney's tartared teeth,
Her tongue is Holloway's Doric;
Nor doth she scorn the Cockney oath,
Historic and plethoric.

Against her breast a loaf she holds,
And into hunches hacks it;
And as she spreads the dripping on,
A grimy finger blacks it.

Yet somewhere in that flabby thing
We starvers know as Nellie,
There dwells a sympathy of sorts
With men of pinchëd belly—

A pity plain and practical
(I never found it tripping),
Expressed in slices thicklier cut
And extra scrapes of dripping.

That's why you'll see, at feeding-time,
The hungriest court her graces,
And when she nods to show she's ours,
Joy lights the famished faces. . . .

Ah! often, in the night, when deep
The vulture-beaks are groping,
Rending red flesh to pluck away
My one last good of hoping;

When E.R.I.'s vermilion vans
Up Calthorpe Street go rumbling;
When No. 10 coughs blasphemy,
And grumous filth 12's grumbling;

I see a vision, puffed and pale,
In skimpy skirt and bodice,
And think a dam' sight more of her
Than Troy did of its goddess!

Heaven takes but scanty stock in me,
I take as much in Heaven;
But when I pray a warm word speeds
For Nellie from 11.

AN EMPTY PURSERY RHYME.

Sing a song of nixpence!
  Poet's hungry—*why?*
Four and twenty blackbirds,
  Bakëd in a pie.
Were the pie but opened,
  Would the poet sing?
Scorning rhyme and rhythm,
  Would he pick a wing?

The King was at his buffet,
  Banqueting and brunching;
The Queen was in her parlour,
  Maids-of-honour munching;
The Maid was in the kitchen,
  Stuffing lamb and peas:
By came the Poet,
  And wolfed *those*—and *these!*

LA PROSCRITE.

O WE are talkers here. We talk
Of all; of Politics and Sport,
Of God and guns and cricket runs,
And *faits divers* of every sort.

We settle Macedonia's fate,
And once for all dispose of Crete;
We back up Lord Charles Beresford
In all pertaining to the Fleet.

The arm-chair strategist may learn
From us: we'll clear his clouded brain:
For we have "been," and we have "seen,"
Ten thousand miles from Laffan's Plain.

To hear us matching sparking-plugs,
You'd think we'd motored in our prams,
And Daimler dear, or neat Napier,
We weigh, dissect, approve or damn.

We mince the 'ologies; appraise
The City Temple's gilded saint;
And even discern in *Art Moderne*
Psyche beneath her cloak of paint.

Poverty, Plumbing, Banking, Bridge,
Roosevelt, Racing, Common Law,
And Stamps, and Books, and Beer, and Spooks :
Of all and everything we jaw—

On earth, or in the sea beneath,
Or in the doubtful heavens above ;
But one thing's barred, one subject's starred :
We never, never, talk of Love. . . .

In the live world beyond these walls,
They talk of Love from night to morn ;
No soul but sings His golden wings,
And swoons with joy, or faints forlorn.

But here, none ever hails the god,
The letters of His name none spells.
Why? There's our woe : we do not know :
Perhaps, our very silence tells.

In Heaven they talk of Love re-won,
Of Love forever lost in Hell ;
But one sad place, outside God's grace,
Is dumb about the miracle.

That's Purgatory, closely caged,
Where Wisdom bandies words with Wit
In chill, and fright, and loveless night.
And Purgatory—*this* is it.

IN THE READING-ROOM.

This is the Castle of Indolence,
  This is the House of Never-Care;
  Mephitic sloth is in the air,
And all philosophers call Sense
  Is wrapped in it, as in his sheet
  Royal Rameses, head and feet.

The Pharaoh's body is mummified:
  His eagle-spirit cleaves the blue:
  But here it is the soul of you
That's gutted, natron-soaked, and tied
  Down to the dust, from all help hid,
  Yourself your shameful pyramid. . . .

The fire's a roaster. Here's a chair!—
  You must to work? You have a plan
  That—? How the rain is pelting, man!—
And suddenly, you're sitting there.
  You stretch your legs; you're snug; you're warm—
  Bellow, Eolus! Blatter, Storm!

Upon the stomach hands are crossed;
Softly and slowly nods the head;
Who slumbers needs but little bread,
And you have still five shillings.—LOST!
For through the blue tobacco mirk—
Hearken!—the siren-song of Shirk:

"You've got the pence for bed and food,
For soak and smoke you have the pence;
Then tell me what's the silly sense
Of slaving? Where's the bally good
In mugging on a ruddy shift,
When you can let the whole world drift?

"To-morrow? *Ah!* . . . To-day the dibs
That buy the B.'s whose lack you dread
(To wit, Beef, Beer, and Baccy and Bed),
You hold, so why go crack your ribs,
And seek your Brother Man to rob,
By sweating out another bob?

"Let empires totter, sultans fall,
Whatever demos-blasts are blown,
You're firmly settled on your throne."—
Lord of the Loafers' Carnival,
Dawdle and doze and dream of feasts,
And be as are your brother beasts!

AUGUST.

A FAT moon leers in the coppery sky,
And the fruit's a-rot on the cabbage-leaves;
A thick Augean stable steam
From its blistered asphalt Holborn heaves
To the stars that are tired, on an air that is sick;
And the water's warm in the drinking-trough.
How is it here in Hell?—Well, *'ot*,
And the oldest Rotten'un calls it tough.

For the tiles that look so cool to the eye
Would grill you holes in a hippo's hide;
And the great Unwashed, that has sworn off soap,
Is lyric and loud in his noisome pride;
And the sawdust, spread for the leaky of lip,
Hops with a small black nimble plague,
Whose cannibal methods of waging war
Lack the imprimatur of The Hague;

And the huge coke cooking-fires that see
The seasons in and the seasons out,
And never die, are a searing curse
That would make an Andaman Islander shout;

And the frizzling bloater's viscous smoke
  Hangs, a blue net, our heads above,
And a million obscene pest-drunk flies
  Buzz in the acrid meshes thereof;

And the tables' litter, with spilth of grease,
  The well-gnawed bone and the ill-gnawed crust,
The stale tea-leaves and the spatters of milk—
  Knew Dante a circle called Disgust? . . .
How the sick gorge dreams of a far-back day,
  Of a green-bowered inn by the Thames' cool blue,
Of a cantaloup *frappé*, a salmon trout,
  And a bottle of Hock!

And that's Hell, too.

PANIS ET CIRCENSES.

In mighty Rome, when Nero ruled,
The simple-minded Plebs he fooled—
Fooled them with royal grace and ease,
By scattering bread and circuses.

To-day, in Britain, Demos rules;
And we, some forty million fools,
With pomps and Parliaments are fed:
We've got the circus. Where's the bread?

I hear a rumour thunder-low—
Soon shrieking to the stars 'twill go:
"Let us have loaves upon our shelves,
We'll make the circus for ourselves."

BAGSTER, FRENCH-POLISHER, DESCANTS.

I NEVER mixes. Elf 'll tell you that.
Elfred!—Jimaiky, three! W'ere was we, nah?
Talkin' o' wu'k? Ar, well, talkin' o' wu'k,
Wot I was goin' to s'y was this—a p'int:
You ever ast yerse'f w'y mos' men wu'k?

Well, some wu'ks fer the sike o' love—a gel
You've got yer eye on, or 'er eye's on you;
Mebbe a mother; or a wife an' kids.
That sort's like fleas in Molbro 'Ouse—'igh-priced.
Some—mos'ly Scotch or Yo'kshiremen, as full
O' meanness as a ditchonary—wu'k
To plug it in a Benk. I knaow 'em—strite—
Gets blind, relijus, tottin' cent per cent,
Addin' their book o' Sundah arternoons—
Readin' the Colleck. (I mus' 'ave me larf.)

But mos' men wu'k to get enough to eat,
To 'ave the stren'th to wu'k, to get enough
To eat, to 'ave the stren'th to wu'k, to—Yuss!
So we go rahnd the ruddy ring o' rowses!

An' w'en the dawnce is owver, 'appy be
To 'ave enough to plent yer bloomin' bownes!
A mug's gime, wot? *To wu'k to get enough*
To eat to 'ave the stren'th to wu'k—. Some s'y
It's Fite! I s'pose it's Fite gives me not 'arf
I need to keep me weary w'istle wet;
An' 'im, the blighted, turkle-fed, uggshorious 'og,
Me boss, 'is chuff-chuff an' 'is shampine wine,
'Is fawncy woman an' 'is fat red neck!
Lor' lummy! FITE! It's me an' mugs like me
Wot wu'ks fer 'im, sweatin' an' sweated crool,
As finds 'is steak, an' fries it brahn, an' p'ys
The sawbownes' guinea w'en 'e's stoked too 'ard!
Yuss, call it Fite! An' so we 'ave—blind Fite!—
Another ruddy ring o' rowses.

Wu'k?

Me frien', w'en 'Enery Bagster's got the price
O' 'arf a pint, or some kind feelin' gent—
Thankee, I will. 'Ere, Elf!—Jimaiky, three!
W'en 'Enery Bagster's got 'is claws abaht
A glawss, 'e 'in't the skilly-blooded sort
To brike 'is bloomin' beck wiv wu'k—no fear!
'Ere's love! 'E'll wu'k w'en Thust jes' tells 'im to—
'E'll wu'k fer Rum. A silly reason? Well,
I look arahnd this cock-eyed, slew-jor'd life—
Wot do I want? Fects! FECTS! Nah, Rum's a *fect:*
Rum's somethin' solid in a wobbly world.
It's cheap. It's there. It's never fur aw'y.

It nips yer stummick, an' it 'eats yer blood;
Gives ye the notion that you're still alive;
Tips ye "Good-night, me lord, an' pleasant dreams!"
Mikes ye fergit that Luck 'as turned ye dahn;
Mikes ye fergit yer pore ol' woman's stiff,
Yer Jack's a 'lifer, an' yer Liz a 'ore;
Mikes ye fergit the d'ys w'en you was quite
Content *to wu'k to get enough to eat*
To 'ave the stren'th—like all the other mugs!
RUM? Rum's a *fect!*

That's w'y you find me 'ere,
Mos' d'ys, a-lappin' of it up. A man
'As *got* to 'ave 'is Fect. Rum's mine—Wot's yours? . . .
Look slippy, cawn't ye, Elf? Jimaiky, three!

SESTINA OF THE SHUFFLING FEET.

Above the wind's wail and the rain's dull beat
I hear the dragging shuffle of countless feet,
That up and down the brown of Calthorpe Street
With the strange bustle of vague purpose go—
That mad uneasy sluggish haste we know
Who strive to flee ourselves, ourselves our woe.

Strike twelve, strike three, ever the clock strikes *Woe;*
And every second, with staccato beat,
Stabs the bleak midnight that so well we know,
And goads the corpse, and pricks the torpid feet,
Till, willy-nilly, shuffling must we go
Among the sinister shadows of the street.

"Fleeing yourself? Good luck, mate!" says the
Street.
"Still at the joysome jig of dodging woe?
Lord! I've seen generations come and go
Along my dingy length, and heard them beat
The harried rhythm of flight with shuffling feet.
Did ever one escape? I do not know.

"God may. But old Despair must surely know.
He's lurking round the corner," laughs the Street,
"With 'What's your game?' to stay all suspect feet,
And keep them marking time till up comes Woe.
Despair's point-duty man on Sorrow's beat:
He swings the traffic hellward—down you go!"

—How shall we turn, then? Whither must we go,
We, weak, that never ruth or refuge know?
Shall we be safer, think you, if we beat
The flickering asphalt of a noisier street?—
"Dark way or bright makes little odds to Woe:
Blind sleuth, he tracks you by your shuffling feet;

"For Fear has plucked the pinions from your feet
(That once, like Mercury's, did glitter and go
Among the stars, outracing Fate and Woe)—
Plucked them and left these crippled things you know,
That shuffle and stumble down the starless street,
And make God's tears start with their hopeless beat."

Is there no human street, off Sorrow's beat,
Where, hid from Woe, strong wings for shuffling feet
Are bartered? We would go there. Do you know?

BY THE DOCKS.

THE smoke-wing'd argosies of Fortune, bearing
Freightage of marvels, are for ever streaming
Hither, and wharfward fling with careless seeming
The rounded fruit of fight and long seafaring.
A derrick clatters: all a year of daring,
Stencilled and boxed, lies in the arc's fierce gleaming;
Trussed in a bale, see Jason's concrete dreaming
Dumped at the feet of dockers nothing caring.
Below the royal keels, the current, sliding
Snakily down and down, sweeps out to Ocean
Dreams just as great as aught lies here. See, under
Yon curd of foam, a girl's face, palely chiding
Life's raucous clamour and thrice vain commotion!
On what far shore will her dream wake, I wonder?

COMRADES.

She was a harlot, and I was a thief—
Each stained with sin as a mildewed leaf
The snail has soiled with obscene slime.
We looked on the sun in his summer prime,
And found in his splendour and might no hope,
For the gibbet was high, and ready the rope,
And a stone's throw off our sepulchre.

Then she on me, and I on her,
Turned lonely eyes in that stark dark hour.
The hemp at my throat, I saw Love's flower
Break o'er her heart that was ashen hell,
And clothe the waste as with asphodel;
And she, while raved the rabble city,
Was 'ware of the lowly herb of Pity
Greening my soul that was hell still hot.
And we smiled.

One spake, and I was not.
I leaped from the flesh, and up the wind
Beat for Judgment, when, far behind,

"I'd have stayed for you," a thin voice cried.
So I slacked, and poised, till she reached my side.
Then the flame that was she and the flame that was I
Touched, and grew one in the lonely sky.

One, we looked down on Earth's dark law;
One, we looked up to the blazing Awe;
One, by the Justice-seat we stood—
And the one that was we the Judge found good,
White from the heel to the high wing-tip,
Burned clean in the fires of comradeship.

MY FRIEND—MR SPUNGE.

He had a cough
As hollow as his hollow heart:
The wheeze was Nature, but the choke was Art.
He said: "I knew you for a toff,
First time I saw you." Playing chess we were,
And I was Blackburne's master, Lasker's equal,
And Lord knows all what else for sequel.
He played me soft as any dulcimer;
His touch
Was much
Like Pachmann's, coaxing Chopin: no wild clutch,
No brutal pound—he gentled me.
He stirred among my various strings,
A zephyr in an aspen-tree,
That moves to song and at the same time sings.
And O the lungy way he spat!
And O the cheesy sob!—a thing to marvel at.

He quoted Browning, too—the swine!—
For he had sucked a curate (and the curate's father's wine);

Read Mrs Humphry Ward—
Yea, Toynbee Hall had shed
The chrism of Culchaw on his head;
Knew Wagner by the card—
Hummed now, in sentimental mood,
"O du mein holder Abendstern,"
And then, more spry,
Lanced loud the Walkyrs' cry—
Letting you so discern
How much of soulful and of good
Lay prisoner behind the bars
Of his rickety cage,
Beating, in high aspiring rage,
Weak wings that might not ever hope to reach the stars.

With a wan smile full of a whole world's pain,
He'd quote an *In Memoriam* quatrain
Not half so brave as was his smile;
Then, in his seat would wilt and sag,
And sigh, and shiver, and shudder, and gulp,
And splutter into a bloody rag
A pint of pulmonary pulp
(His guile!),
And murmur "O my God! some brandy!"

Well—I'd have threepence handy.
The "Union" was across the street—
There was my breakfast gone—but he was on his feet!

Whereafter—once again—I'd wring
Confession from him, pale with shame,
That naught to which you'd give the name
Of food had passed his lips these thirty hours
(How can so damnable a thing
Be in this gluttonous world of ours?)—
And he would look on me with dumb pained eyes.
Then I: "To-morrow this man dies.
Be kind to him—you must.
A few more numbered days, and he is dust,
But, while he lives, the sun to him is sweet;
Give, then, your brother to eat.
You, who are fresh to hunger and sorrow,
Borrow
From your glad past, and your still hopeful future,
Something to suture
The raw edges of his torn life,
Your brother's, bruised and maimed and martyred in the strife!
God reigns? Maybe. But this man starves? In sooth.
And Belly-need screams out her scarlet truth—
'One only thing is worthy and good:
Food!'"

So—into the till of old Joe's coffee-stall
My next day's dinner-money 'd fall,
To stuff the cadging carrion with all

There was of eggs, and sandwiches, and tea,
Nelsons with currants thick as summer flies,
And cheese-cakes saffron-gold as August sunset skies.
And I would know the ecstasy,
The thrill without alloy,
The splendid hot keen joy
Of being Mæcenas, proud and willing,
With my last shilling.
O then, the light that lit his eye,
And O, his heavenly sigh!
The flame, the wind, of gratitude?
No, by the Rood!
Naught but the artist's conscious pride
At nosing out a noble sucker,
Who promised, all his instincts cried,
To furnish famous toll of tucker.

How many a night I paid his bed—
The sponge, the sneak!
In my slim dish he dipped and fed,
How many a week!
I gave my boots, I gave my shirt,
My coat I gave,
To hold this splash of London dirt
Back from the grave.
He vowed I was his only friend:
He'd die for me,
He'd murder, steal, ay (Heaven forfend!),
He'd lie for me,

And lying was to him, he swore,
The last black sin—
And spat his lungs upon the floor,
And took me in!

Because I was a joy whose name was Mud,
He sucked my blood.
Because I would stay out and get the rain,
His task was easy and plain.
And if I chose to play Almighty God in little
To him, the cringer, the lickspittle—
Well, then, I had to pay.
To that I've naught to say.
BUT—when, by some tongue-slip,
He learned my secret (all we men have one),
And hawked it round the House for drinks—
My pain, *my* sorrow, for a pot of ale!—
I laid the whip
Of such hot scorn as the worm thinks
Must melt the hook, about his pale
And pasty head, and bade him run
Ere I had—*O Lord, yes, he ran!*
He ran
Just like—a man!

And as he sprinted he let fall a book.

"Marcus Aurelius," you guess?
"Tristram of Lyonesse?"

Or Omar's wisdom? He had kissed the feet
Of all of them, the cheat!
I picked it up and stole a look:
"Post Office Savings Bank"—his name.
I peeped inside, and felt no shame:
He'd £23, 13s. to his credit!

And so I knew the Thing—and I had fed It.

THE LETTER-SCRAPPER.

Scratch, scratch, scratch,
With a Gillott rusty and worn!
Scratch, scratch, scratch,
In the murky gleam of morn!
Scratch in the noontide's brassy glare,
Scratch by the fading light!
Scratch by the leaping gas-jet's flare
Into the hag-rid night—

Addresses, addresses, addresses,
On circular, envelope, wrapper,
Scratching a shallow grave for himself,
Scratches the Letter-Scrapper.

THESE—in a flourishy flowing fist—
To His Grace, the Duke, at the Hall;
To the Reverend Rector, plump and bland,
And richer than Peter and Paul;
To the Widow, with children and eighty pounds,
Tempting her risk their all;

To Dr A., and to Z., Esquire,—
"FORTUNES TO MAKE, AND HOW."
To-morrow they'll dream of a galley of gold,
With Danaë carved at the prow!
But the Scrapper scratches, scratches, and dreams
Of his two and a tanner a thou.,

With bed and bread and ink to buy,
And snuff to keep him awake,
And enough for a half of Irish cold
Man's rightful thirst to slake—
And the fox-faced middleman lurking by,
His thirty per cent to take.

There's blue in the sky, there's green on the tree,
But Ink like Death is black;
We others may joy in the wind on the Heath,
But the Scrapper must round his back,
For Sunday and Monday are one to him,
And the cramped hand dare not slack—
Though Little-Ease is a nightmare past,
And Law has wrecked the Rack.

Addresses, addresses, addresses,
On circular, envelope, wrapper,
Scratching a shallow grave for himself,
Scratches the Letter-Scrapper.

THE CHUCKER-OUT.

Six foot from sinciput to sole: thereto,
A ready toe for loafers; a splay fist
That yanks a brawler, with a tricky twist,
Into a colder world, a starrier blue;
A horse-mouth grin of greeting for the few
Who've learned how this old lime-kiln Guardsman drinks
(He mopped the Modder, mud and blood and stinks),
And pay their casual pot of Benskin's brew;
A thunder-scowl for such as love not soap,
Turn up the nose at tubs, and sniff at Keating;
A voice where Stentor, resurrected, bawls;
An eye that boils like many waters meeting;
No reverence for God, some for the Pope,
Much for his hero, Roberts: that is Chawles!

FUNERAL ORATION ON JAMES * * *,

Sneak-Thief and Suicide.

On 'is 'aid. . . . Yuss, 'im wiv the waxt moustache,
And the Gord A'mighty manner. . . .
Played chess wiv 'im? *Did* ye? Well, 'e's gone splash—
An' I owed the blighter a tanner.

It's fifty feet, if a hinch, of a drop,
An' Portlan' cement's ain't dahn. . . .
Ye'd 'ave larfed if ye'd seen the fice of the slop,
W'en 'e fahnd Jim'd done 'im brahn.

Gone fust to 'is locker, an' got the stuff,
Rolled neat in 'is other shirt.
Booked fer a stretch—*'e* knew well enough,
So 'e done it in at a spurt.

Blood? Rather! A brarsted pool in the yard,
But they've washed it nice wiv the 'owse. . . .
But 'ow 'e got aht, for the winders 's barred,
It's 'is winder an' 'im as knaows.

Fawther's a dryper dahn 'Oxton w'y—
A chronic Baptis'. *'Im?* Not 'e:
'E'll let Sain' Pancras foot it. . . . *I s'y—*
Wot luck! 'E might 'a' owed me!

THE VETERAN.

WHITE your head and bowed your back, John Mackay;
Eyes are dim and knees are slack, John Mackay;
Far yon golden morning, when
You forsook Kildonan's glen
And the thackit but-an'-ben, John Mackay.

You were of a stormy strain, John Mackay;
Reay blood ran in every vein, John Mackay;
So you sought the musket's crack,
And you helped to free the black
By the glorious Potomac, John Mackay.

Burned and battered, scarred and seamed, John Mackay,
Everywhere that blue blades gleamed, John Mackay,
You took service and your fill
Of the thunder and the thrill—
Mexico, Peru, Brazil, John Mackay.

When the lightfoot lads of France, John Mackay,
To the Prussian pipe did dance, John Mackay,
You were in it, brawling Scot,
Till a Brandeburger shot
Laid you low at Gravelotte, John Mackay.

Leipzig's prison, winter's cold (John Mackay);
Serried sentries could not hold John Mackay;
You escaped the Dirty Hen,[1]
Came to London, drove a pen,
Like the cravenest of men, John Mackay.

Thirty years of faithful work, John Mackay;
Not a single hour of shirk, John Mackay;
"War is Hell, and Peace is sweet"
Like a prayer you would repeat!
Now—they've flung you to the street, John Mackay.

Peace is cruel. War is kind, John Mackay:
One swift pang—and Life's behind, John Mackay.
London sucks us old, and then—
Out we go for younger men;
And we'll never see our glen, John Mackay.

[1] John's name for the Black Eagle.

'OME, SWEET 'OME.

BEING THE SENTIMENT OF MY PAL, THE SNOB.

I BEEN a Tommy, an' I been
  Abaht this giddy world a bit,
An' I 'ave seen wot most ain't seen—
  The ruddy gaudiest sights of it:
Injiar, an' Chinar, an' the Nile,
  An' Krujerland, an' Singapore—
An' everyw'ere an' all the while
  I fahnd the 'ole fit-up a bore.

W'y so? That's more nor I can tell;
  But bein' Cockney bo'n an' bred,
  I knaow I'd oaf'n 'a guv me 'ead,
To be beck 'ome in Clerkenwell.

In Chinar onct I thought to st'y:
  There was a slew-eyed yella tart,
As 'ad a leery lovin' w'y
  Fair coopered up me martial 'eart.

We smoked the dope—a lovely drunk!—
An' she were rahnd me neck that sweet,
An yngel in a land that stunk—
Two words, she 'ad me done a treat.

An' then I 'ears *a tram-car bell!*
In course, it were a temple gong!
That queered the pitch of Winnie Wong,
An' called me beck to Clerkenwell.

Naow, Egyp'! Egyp's none so bad
For lords an' motts to tike their ease;
There's smells there, too, that mike ye glad,
An' King's Cross Rowd it knocks for fleas.
An' Injiar's none so slow for gumps
Wot mooch arahnd in search o' sun,
Or 'anker arter gods wiv mumps,
Shikar, or snikes, or sim'lar fun.

Colombo's 'eaven, Haden's 'ell,
Peshawur is dear at any price:
I'd swop the lot for twenty pice,
An' troop-ship 'ome to Clerkenwell.

Been onct to Parry on a trip,
An' seen their ruddy Shongs Eleeze.
It guv me—strite—the purple pip:
Wot do I want wiv grawss an' trees?

Wot use is green-stuff in a tahn,
Excep' a bunch o' crease at tea?
I likes me streets all nice an' brahn—
An' Beerbohm for me ownly Tree.

Parry be sugared! It's a sell:
From 7 A. to 7 P.,
I snooved arahnd, an' didn' see
One spot to touch up Clerkenwell.

To swear be Dublin there's a lot,
An' some is strong on Bethnal Green,
An' onct I knew a blighter wot
Were balmy—guess!—on Aberdeen!
But me, wot's seen the 'Imal'y,
An' me, wots seen the Tedge Mee-all,
An' me, wot knaows the Tommy's w'y
From York to Cork, from Gib to Galle,

I knaow there's not, this side of 'Ell
(Or t'other, if ye'd like the trip!),
An 'ole that's fit to 'old a dip
To 'omey smelly Clerkenwell.

LA BOUTIQUE D'EN FACE.

'Deed-to-Cot Chones has left Llanrwst
To make his pile in London Town,
And he has leased the little shop
Next door to that of Mrs Brown;
And if you ask me, "Does he thrive?"
I answer, "Chones will soon arrive."

He's up at three, at four his beak
Gapes wide to catch the early worm;
At midnight he is poring still
Over the ledgers of the Firm—
For he is Chones and Company,
Which last is Wife and Daughters three.

He eats—but no, he does not eat:
He chews cheese-parings when he can;
He sleeps—but no, he does not sleep:
He's a machine, and not a man;
Fate dropped a penny in a slot—
Chones moved, and moves, and ceases not.

He sells us skimpy farthing-worths
  Of milk and butter, bread and cheese,
Tea, coffee, chocolate, sardines,
  And red Teutonic sausages.
All that a farthing buys he sells—
And, patriot, banks at double Ll's.

He's not polite. He always asks
  To see the colour of our tin
Before he'll cut a slice of ham—
  And Lord! but he can cut it thin!
Yet, once—I'd spent whole thirteenpence—
His "sanks" were gallant and intense.

The roll that fresh a penny costs,
  To-morrow for the half he'll vend;
And not a coin he touches but
  He bites upon, and if it bend
He's screaming "Murter! Roppers! Fire!"
Snide-passers, rouse not Chones's ire.

He thinks in farthings, hopes in pence,
  And dreams in sovereigns bright and new—
And to his hopes and dreams and thoughts,
  The soul of Chones is ever true.
A sufferine? Loud in its ring,
Chones hears a whole Eisteddfod sing.

If Heaven be, as some folks think,
  Just doing what we darn well please,
Just having what our soul desires—
  'Deed-to-Cot Chones will be at ease:
By scramble and scrabble and pushful dint,
He'll have the job—*he'll haunt the Mint.*

A FEW THUMBNAILS.

MAX.

'Twas Lemberg's ghetto spawned this red-haired Jew
  Hawks "Justice," Social Democratic tea
(A black gastralgic proletarian brew),
  And *überwaschecht* 'Oun'sditch 'osiery.
For that himself, not Man, is poor, the rich
He loathes. Say "Rothschild," and his crab-claws twitch
With murder, while his toad-soul doth upspew
  Such slaver of hate and Yiddish blasphemy,
That, anarchist but human, I review
  My principles—and plump for Property.

MY PAL, THE SNOB.

He played with Irving—well, he shifted scenes;
  And at Vereeniging just missed the Cross;
Giving the Boxers ruddy sorts of beans,
  For loot had jaundice and a crimson joss.
Now Jones taps heels and artful patches fakes,
And thinks Mankind a scarlet sack of snakes.
To Democratic Toryism he leans:
  "Gimme a sanguinary gent for boss!"
Would go—below for "leg o' pork and greens;"
  And never lacks the brown makes up your doss.

A GOOD OLD SPORT.

Horse-flesh his god, his paradise
The Turf, his Book the Prophecies of Coe,
Terrestrial bliss a decent starting-price,
Dickson is the devoutest man I know;
Goes hungry often, does not booze or beg,
And jerks a creaky artificial leg.
Last week he crabbed around upon a crutch,
Trouser half-filled. I asked the reason why.
"Cawn't guess? She's up the spaht—a twelve bob touch,—
A spoht mus' 'ave 'is flutter o' Dohby D'y!"

THE AUTHOR.

Nearing, if not beyond the allotted span,
Lean in his tweeds and linen without spot,
A tall white-haired, close-shaven gentleman
Passed slowly, brandishing a porridge pot.
Spunge whispered me with awe: "Dje see 'im? Well—
He wrote the Nineteenth Century article:
'Life on Ten Bob a Week.' O' course, ye can,
But ye mus' think it aht, an' think a lot.
I cawn't meself. But—*'im!*"—and reverence ran,
Gurgling. . . . HE was, I'm proud to say, a Scot.

FIVE THOU. PER CENT.

He used to tool his pair from Notting Hill,
And quaff at lunch the famous "cup" of Pim.
He's got a touch of 'Change about him still:
His coat is cut, his shirt was made for him.
Morphia and a French madam piped the tune
Romped in the Registrar and Justice Jeune.
Here he remembers his financial skill,
Lending at interest uncommon grim;
A bob for two in a week! And so doth fill
His purse and his Pravaz, the devil's limb!

A CHILD OF ITALY.

Was nothing greater than Boccaccio's Tales,
He vowed, save Dante; loved his sunkist land—
Stored some of it beneath his finger-nails;
And Regicide and Revolution planned.
He had his first and last bath in the Po,
Oozed garlic, and was styled Ambrosio.
"I leave the 'Ouse; no gambits more; all ends"—
He sighed, while fog garrotted Saffron Hill.
"I give you sometings—treasured for my friends:
Thumb on the blade, and then strike—up—to kill."

"*DADDIE.*"

I washed beside him six months out of nine—
A dear old chap, ectropion-afflicted,
Moses for meekness, with one fault: in fine,
To borrowing my soap he was addicted—
A cleanly foible! I affectioned him,
He was so frail, so feeble, Life so grim!
He disappeared. "What's come to Daddie Brown?"
"Been nabbed again. 'Ard lines at sixty-four.
They got 'im—Grosvenor Mansions—slidin' down
The ruddy gutter, from the seventh floor."

MISTER B——.

With big Blue Pencil and with big blue eyes,
The presbyopic Clerk, beside the stile,
Taking your pence, your new name, and your "size,"
Hides, at "John Smith," in his moustache, a smile:
He sees so much that he divines the rest.
Like Peter at the Portal of the Blest,
He knows "his world"—and cultivates but few
Illus ons on the merits of the ruck:
"A lazy, lousy, dull, apostate crew,
Forswearing Work to worship Liquor and Luck!"

THE MANAGER.

Ex-Sergeant-Major of the Guards, he's here
The Colonel of a raffish regiment.
He does not look at it but *over*. (Queer—
Command should make man so indifferent.)
Like Jove, he thrones; like Jove sometimes unbends,
And even to crack a chestnut condescends:
"A good one, that? Ha! ha!" And off he trots,
With Chawles for aide, his barracks to inspect—
His House, his cubicles, his kitchen-pots—
And cull the easy laurels of respect.

AFTER LONG DAYS.

When April's foot bestarred the grass,
And waked to sunward song the Lark,
You carved a name upon the bark—
For, O my lad, you loved the lass.

Now, had you taken a paint-brush—. But
Passion has something of sublime:
You'd cheat the traitor touch of Time:
And so with mastery you *cut*.

'Tis now December. Turn that way—
You scarcely recognise the place;
The locust years have eaten its grace,
And left but *EVE* your steps to stay.

The carven word is like the Spring
That wakes to sunward song the Lark:
Out of the wrinkled, cankered bark
Her eyes, her smile, her laughter's ring,

Herself, rerise in loveliness;
And *thus* she looked; and *that* she said;
And *so* her small hands held your head;
And *this*, her young mouth's hot caress.

. . . . . .

His history tear-furrows spell,
Who counts the midnight hours with Pain;
Guards scorch and singe, who walks in Hell—
Who lies in foulness, certain stain;
And who knows Fate's knife in his bark
May heal his wound, but keeps the mark,
Which seeing daily, he daily dies
Of the remembered miseries.

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